

Celebrating Wholeness

Halloween, All Saints, and All Souls

We are now almost to the end of the liturgical calendar year when there are three interesting days, the secular holiday of Halloween, the Feast of All Saints, and All Souls Day. How does each of these fit into our living today? Let us take a look.

The dictionary tells us that Wholeness is "*a state of robust good health, an undivided and unbroken completeness.*" Maturity is an unending process in the life cycle of any organism or community. Our universe is an excellent example of this process in the constant birthing and dying of many stars and planets in billions of galaxies. In many ways the time involved is rather lengthy but not otherwise different from basic life.

As we advance through the Liturgical Year, we celebrate our growing awareness of the progressive revelation and experience of Christian maturity. It is a process that continues annually to enable us to become more fully aware of God's Realm and purpose for each of us in being and becoming. Coming into an active relationship with our Source enables a broader understanding of our partnership with Creation. Learning about others whose experiences preceded ours gives us a vivid example for positive and negative postures from which to learn. These assets help us toward a greater purpose to adapt our understanding for a life of survival, security, significance.

The Middle Ages, from the 5th to the 15th centuries, between the Classic and Modern Era brought many changes. Early on "*The feast of All Saints, on its current date, is traced to the foundation by Pope Gregory III (731–741) of an oratory in St. Peter's for the relics of the holy apostles and of all saints, martyrs and confessors, of all the just made perfect who are at rest throughout the world, with the day moved to November 1.*" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Saints] "*Medieval historians did not, of course, think of themselves as being in the middle of history. Instead, they wrote history from a universal and theological perspective. They considered the Roman period, especially the time of the Apostles, a historical peak, followed by a long slide toward the Apocalypse.*" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages]

All Saints' Day, often shortened to All Saints, is a solemnity celebrated on 1 November in Western Christianity, and on the first Sunday after Pentecost in Eastern Christianity, in honor of all the saints, known and unknown. In terms of Western Christian theology, the day commemorates all those who have attained the beatific vision in Heaven. It is a national holiday in many Catholic countries. In the Roman Catholic Church, the next day, All Souls' Day, specifically commemorates the departed faithful who have not yet been purified and reached heaven. Christian denominations, while differing with the Roman Catholic Church in their interpretations of varying states of grace, also celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints Day and the Feast of All Souls Day because of the fundamental belief that there is a prayerful spiritual communion between those who are living and those who have died. Those who have died and are with God watch over those still living, and the saints are held to intercede with God on behalf of the living. On their part, the living pray to the saints and remember in intercessory prayers to God all who have died, particularly their deceased relatives and friends. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Saints]

The festival was retained after the Reformation in the calendar of the Anglican Church and in many Lutheran churches. In the Lutheran churches, such as the Church of Sweden, it assumes a role of general commemoration of the dead. In the Swedish calendar, the observance takes place on the

Saturday between October 31 and November 6. In many Lutheran Churches, it is moved to the first Sunday of November. Other Protestants of the English tradition, such as the United Church of Canada, the Methodist churches, and the Wesleyan Church, also celebrate it. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Saints]

Historically, the Western tradition identifies the general custom of praying for the dead with the Jewish practice of prayer for the dead dating as far back as 2 Maccabees 12:42-46. The custom of setting apart a special day of intercession for certain of the faithful on 2 November was first established by St. Odilo of Cluny (d. 1048) at his abbey of Cluny in 998. The decree ordaining the celebration is printed in the Bollandist Acta Sanctorum (Saec. VI, pt. i. p. 585). From Cluny the custom spread to the other houses of the Cluniac order, which became the largest and most extensive network of monasteries in Europe. The celebration was soon adopted in several dioceses in France, and spread throughout the Western Church. It was accepted in Rome only in the fourteenth century. While 2 November remained the liturgical celebration, in time the entire month of November became associated in the Western Catholic tradition with prayer for the departed; lists of names of those to be remembered being placed in the proximity of the altar on which the sacrifice of the mass is offered. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Souls'_Day]

Note: *Additional information for the Latin American holiday, see Day of the Dead. For the 2005 film, see All Souls Day (film). For the Chinese holiday, see Qingming Festival. For the Buddhist holiday, see Ghost Festival.* - in the heading of this URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Saints]

Halloween is an annual holiday observed on October 31. It has roots in the Celtic festival of Samhain and the Christian holiday All Saints' Day, but is today largely a secular celebration. Common Halloween activities include trick-or-treating, wearing costumes and attending costume parties, carving jack-o'-lanterns, ghost tours, bonfires, apple bobbing, visiting haunted attractions, committing pranks, telling ghost stories or other frightening tales, and watching horror films. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halloween>]

Holidays are often both thoughtful and fun. From a universal perspective these are inclusive and not necessarily opposing experiences. When celebrations with similar intent come from a variety of places and cultures they are usually robust with substance and action. Sometimes we learn and absorb more when sober concepts are presented through stories, plays, and stimulating activity. Inclusivity, and not either/or, may be best for most people of all ages. It may be best to not take life too seriously?

Myth and Mystery:

How does one continue to grow and become? The Liturgical Year is one of the ways, filled with events and celebrations that enable us to do just that. It reminds us of the cycles of our universe along with the important recurring events of living our daily lives year after year. Myth and mystery facilitate our comprehensive participation in the understanding of our lives in concert with the Realm of God and our interdependence within the world and better relationship with others. These following authors may assist our understanding and comfort with the two concepts, myth and mystery, that may not be so familiar in our western culture.

Joseph Campbell, whom Newsweek said, "*Campbell has become the rarest of intellectuals in American life: a serious thinker who has been embraced by the popular culture*" asked this question,

"How, in the contemporary period, can we evoke the imagery that communicates the most profound and most richly developed sense of experiencing life?" ["Thou Art That – Transforming Religious Metaphor", by Joseph Campbell, New World Library, Novato, CA, pg. 8] His answer was through Metaphor and Mystery. "Mythology may, in a real sense, be defined as other people's religion. And religion may, in a sense, be understood as a popular misunderstanding of mythology." ["Thou Art That – Transforming Religious Metaphor", by Joseph Campbell, New World Library, Novato, CA, pg. 8] When talking about mystery Campbell says, "There are two orders of religious perspective. One is ethical, pitting good against evil. In the biblically grounded Christian West, the accent is on ethics, on good against evil. We are thus bound by our religion itself to the field of duality. The mystical perspective, however, views good and evil as aspects of one process. One finds this in the Chinese yin-yang sign, the dai-chi. We have, then, these two totally different religious perspectives." ["Thou Art That – Transforming Religious Metaphor", by Joseph Campbell, New World Library, Novato, CA, pg. 16]

Richard Rohr, O.F.M., is a revered speaker and prolific author. In his book, "The Naked Now - Learning to See as the Mystics See", he shares this in his chapter, "What about Jesus?":

"In relativizing both time and space, Jesus is doing something similar to what Eckhart Tolle is doing for many today with his "power of now." He makes us look for the Absolute in a different way than by "certain ideas." Any good spiritual teacher has to overcome both space and time, or they have no ability to give you a sense of the eternal and the Really Real. I would in fact say this is essential. Poor spiritual teaching is always saying "only" here and "only" there, such as "only in my church." Good spiritual teaching is always saying "always" and "everywhere."

Jesus concludes this dialogue with a most telling line. "You will live long to see, but you will not see" (Luke 17:22). It is a judgment on all religion that is trapped in here or there, now and then. Even worse, in our spiritual blindness, we often applied such criticism of spiritual blindness to other people - such as "those incorrigible Jews" or "those Catholics" - thereby losing the essential point, which is the transformational message for ourselves. In both of these passages, Jesus is exactly repeating the Sanskrit neti, neti of ancient Hinduism. "Not this, not that" was taught by ancient sages to protect the final unpronounceability and full knowability of the Holy." ["The Naked Now – Learning to See as the Mystics See", by Richard Rohr, The Crossroad Punishing Co., NY, pgs. 76-77]

We know that we are gifted with our five senses, sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. We are not as cognizant and familiar with our inward graces and abilities like thinking, feelings, precognition, past, future, and awareness of our mortality. The outward and visible nature of our five senses seem easier to know and understand because they are more visible to us even though we are not always conscious of their use. Our inward and invisible graces are our gifts as well but are usually more foreign to us because they are inward and invisible, so to speak. Earlier we said that in the Liturgical Year we celebrate our growing awareness of the progressive revelation and experience of Christian maturity. Living the Liturgical Year helps us to become more mature as we rehearse and celebrate our way into wholeness. I believe the myth and mystery of these holy events are the keys to keep us moving forward in our thinking and actions year by year and help us to fully develop all our senses and gifts for living.

Mysticism is the pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insight. It most commonly centers on the regular practice of deep prayer, meditation, and contemplation. This approach and lifestyle is distinguished from other forms of Christian practice by its aim of achieving unity with the divine. Mysticism aspires to apprehend spiritual truths inaccessible through intellectual means, typically by learning how to think

like Christ. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_mysticism] This view should not be seen in competition with more intellectual methods of one's knowledge and understanding of God nor should it be considered less important. Perhaps we need to recognize our western habit of separating the inward and outward with our dualistic tendency of either/or instead of both/and toward being more inclusive and open to a life of wholeness.

These concepts and methods for wholeness in relationships and understanding with God and one another are not new. In fact, to most people around our globe, these are common and primary with regards to their ways. As we noted above, Joseph Campbell says, *"There are two orders of religious perspective. One is ethical, pitting good against evil. In the biblically grounded Christian West, the accent is on ethics, on good against evil. We are thus bound by our religion itself to the field of duality. The mystical perspective, however, views good and evil as aspects of one process. One finds this in the Chinese yin-yang sign, the dai-chi. We have, then, these two totally different religious perspectives."* While the process of non-dualistic religious perspectives were primary in most of the west, a concern for the experience of a mystical experience with God was important for many. Even in our Judaic roots we discover this passion among our forbearers. Kabbalah (Hebrew: Qabbalah lit. "receiving"; Qabala) is a discipline and school of thought concerned with the mystical aspect of Rabbinic Judaism. It is a set of esoteric teachings meant to explain the relationship between an eternal and mysterious Creator and the mortal and finite universe (His creation).

Kabbalah originally developed entirely within the realm of Jewish thought and constantly uses classical Jewish sources to explain and demonstrate its esoteric teachings. These teachings are thus held by kabbalists to define the inner meaning of both the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and traditional rabbinic literature, as well as to explain the significance of Jewish religious observances. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabbalah>]

Similar groups of Christians throughout the middle ages, especially among many of our Monastic communities, sought a very personal and experiential relationship with God in the depth of their being. The simplicity of outward and sensual awareness was not enough. Perhaps the majority of those who were willing to sacrifice their lives for their Faith and who were so driven to seek to serve others as their life's work were among the mystics. Some of those, now known as Saints are: Gregory of Nyssa, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, Catherine of Siena. In the 15th to through the 18th century; Ignatius of Loyola, John of Avila, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, and one of our 20th century mystics whom I am sure you know, Thomas Merton. These and many others like them have had a great influence in our world views along the centuries of thought even though we may never have become personally acquainted with their lives or writings.

It would seem that western humanity finds it easier to function most commonly through their outward sensual gifts. These are the gifts that we share in common with all similar animal life. It is, however, our inward and unique gifts of sensuality that give us our real advantages to live more fully and expand our productivity horizons. I believe that these inward and invisible gifts enable us to become "soul mates" in social friendships, especially in spousal connections. These gifts to contemplate the myths and mysteries of life have enabled humans to be leaders among all the other forms of living things. They enable us to consider the past and learn from history remembering that, *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."* As written by George Santayana in his first volume of, "The Life of Reason". We are able to speculate and plan for the future because of our gifts of imagination and interpretation as we mature. Our ability to be consciously aware of our choices and to become comfortable in doing so comes from these inward and special gifts.

Let us be grateful for these seasonal celebrations at the end of October and beginning of November in our "Living the Liturgical Year". There is a lot of magic in these moments that give us the opportunity to connect with our past, present and future. They are an integral part of our connection in our animated existential world and universe. It is good to stop, meditate, and celebrate the wonders and cycles of our lives. Liturgy, coming from the Greek meaning "the work of the people", is one of the many ways we have to appreciate and enjoy the work of being fully alive.